

## THE LINCOLN PLOT.

## The Tale of Alleged Cruelty at Dry Tortugas.

## PRISONER'S STORY OF TORTURE.

## Bad Food and Bad Treatment Part of the Complaint.

Recruits Said to Have Been Persecuted by the Officers Placed Over Them—Assertion That One of Them Was Killed by a Sergeant—Drunkness Among the Commissioned Officers Also Specified in This Man's Charges.

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During the first year and a half the Dry Tortugas was anything but a paradise. There did not pass a day but men could be seen tied up by their thumbs, between the sky and the earth, until the joints of their thumbs were nearly pulled from their sockets; some carried to the Gulf Stream, bound in cords and nearly drowned, and others tied up in the guardhouse and beaten upon their naked backs.

Many of these cruelties were inflicted by the officers placed over them. The example set by some of the officers in charge of them had dared to become intoxicated. There was another mode of punishment applied in many instances. Men were what they termed nailed to the cross or spread-eagle fashion, and others were tied with their hands behind them to swinging limbs, the tips of their toes barely touching the earth.

If these same cruelties were practiced in other portions of the army to the same extent as was done at Dry Tortugas the cause of so many desertions from the service could easily be discerned. Had the soldiers at that post the facilities of deserting there would have been but few of the command left to do garrison duty.

Many left in small boats, to make their way from the scenes of torture, across 200 miles of sea, preferring to risk their lives upon the deep than to remain, daily exposed to death by such brutal measures enforced there. These particular cases I will hereafter refer to, as being as far as possible, to relate such things in order, as far as memory can recall.

A short time after Col. Grenfell's removal to other quarters a case of smallpox broke out upon the island. The patient, instead of being placed in a remote corner of the fort, there being many unoccupied casements available at the time, where the disease would not endanger others, was brought and placed midway between our quarters and those of Col. Grenfell. We came in contact with it daily as we passed to and from our labor. Col. Grenfell receiving the full benefit therefrom upon each puff of wind that passed. We failed to become inoculated with the loathsome disease, however.

Finding the patient still remaining in close proximity to each of our quarters, Col. Grenfell obtained a large blackboard, and upon it in large letters inscribed "Small-pox Hospital," directing all persons on the island to shun it. This drew the attention of the officers, together with the marines, heard all over the island, and the patient was removed to another portion of the fort. The action of the authorities in this affair was so pointed that not only ourselves, but each man upon the island, firmly believed that it was done for the express purpose of inoculating us with this fearful and loathsome malady.

Col. Grenfell's record. Col. Grenfell was severely reprimanded for his action and was commanded to take in the board and all to be very strict in his actions in the future. He was not in the least intimidated, but strictly guarded the actions of the officers at the fort, recording them in a diary, which he kept, recording them in a diary, which he kept, recording them in a diary, which he kept.

At this period starvation was horrible and of the most disgusting nature. We sustained ourselves from our own resources. It was a golden day that we possessed it, otherwise starvation would have stared us in the face.

Col. Grenfell's quarters were papered over its woodwork from inwardly with his daily rations of bread and meat, a nail having been placed through it to fasten it to the wall. Soldiers were loudly complaining about their rations and the quality issued. Often when guarding us they requested something to eat, stating that they were nearly starved; that they were robbed of their rations, etc.

Many a one's hunger was relieved by us.

from our own scant supply, through which we gained their friendliness in some instances, but as a general thing they were afraid, and sympathized with us in our misfortunes, and would have permitted us to have escaped if doing so they would not have been compromised in the matter.

They complained bitterly of the distribution of the company fund, stating that the benefit therefrom was not received by them, but used by the company officers themselves. This was the general complaint among them all during the first two years of our incarceration. I make no assertion myself of accusation in this matter, as I am entirely ignorant upon the subject, and I give but the statements of others in this special instance.

## RECRUITS MALTREATED.

Never were a lot of recruits worse maltreated. They were beaten, bruised and punished by the harsh treatment and punishment awarded. Inhumanity seemed to be the ruling element, and barbarity and injustice the only thoughts of those in power, our rulers. Sunday morning would always find twenty or thirty packing barrels at the guardhouse in the boiling sun, until some of them, exhausted and overcome by heat, would fall in an almost lifeless condition and be there, no notice being taken of them until after the fact had been reported to the officer of the day, when they would be picked up and conveyed to the hospital for medical treatment.

A French Canadian died about a month after his arrival, superintended from the cruelties practiced upon him by the first sergeant of his company, receiving knocks on the head, body and limbs from the butt-end of the musket, used until nature gave way, and he was assigned to a premature grave on the adjacent island of East Key. The man who perpetrated this piece of cruelty was afterward, through examination, made a Lieutenant in the United States Army. This was not the only instance of his cruelty, as every soldier who was in the company can testify. He misused, with but few exceptions, every man in the company.

A private soldier of his company by the name of Street came into the hospital one morning while I was there with the blood streaming down his neck from a wound inflicted at the hands of this sergeant during drill. I saw the man myself and received my information directly from him. I cannot remember the names of the many so ill-treated, but they were numerous. In one instance he struck one of the soldiers of his company over the fingers with his salve, nearly severing them from the hand. Often was I shown, also, by my roommates, deep and black bruises on their bodies.

A SHOCKING CASE. Another instance of heartless inhumanity was perpetrated upon a soldier in Company Fifth Artillery, by name of Christian Gorman. A German comrade had been afflicted with fits and suffering so much therefrom that he was unable to perform his duties in his company. He was placed in the hospital. While there his condition grew rapidly worse, the lower portion of his body becoming nearly useless to him, it being with the utmost difficulty that he could drag one foot after the other.

The doctor in charge stated that this was more pretence, and that he would have been proud to have seen the man discharged from the hospital, placed in the guardhouse and ordered to carry a twenty-four pound log, which was done under the most excruciating pain, as the man trembled like an aspen all over from the exertion required to execute the imposed task, his limbs being dragged along almost by the force of action. During the performance of this task, a cruelty unsurpassed, his frame was violently contorted with repeated fits, the command given being that no soldier should interfere or offer any assistance in the pretended agony, and he was left writhing in his agony without any helping hand being permitted to reach forth to relieve his sufferings.

For a week he remained in the guardhouse, attacked repeatedly with these fits. Buckets of water were ordered to be poured over him when under their influence, and his condition grew worse and worse. He was again removed to the hospital, where he remained until some time in November, 1891, when he was discharged from the service of the United States. He was borne upon a stretcher to a steamer lying at the wharf, a helpless man, unable to stand up or move his lower limbs. He frequently expressed the opinion that the doctor who was trying to kill him, and whenever the physician made his appearance in his ward his entire frame shook with fright and horror.

HARD DRINKERS. Harshness began to increase in manner, both to the soldiers and prisoners. Drunkenness ran riot on the island. There was not a day passed but that one could be seen reeling under its influence as they staggered down the walk leading from their barracks to the salty port of the fort. Gaze where you would, the eye would come in contact with some of them, inebriated, a disgrace and dishonor to the service of the country which they represented.

Liquor was obtained from every boat that entered the harbor, and if the supply became exhausted before the arrival of a boat again inroads were made upon the hospital supplies, so that when needed in case of sickness the supply was exhausted. I state this not upon mere hearsay; I have witnessed all these things myself; have seen the exhausted before the arrival of a boat, have seen the orderly as he returned carrying the bottles; have unwrapped the covering and read the label "Spiritus Frumenti," and have seen the peculiar bar containing the fluid upon the officers' table.

But with this I have naught to do. If

the Government permits its officers to live under the influence of liquor and advances supplies for such purposes, we, the people, have no right to complain, but must support it. From the barbarous treatment daily received from the officers under the influence of intoxicating draughts, many of the soldiers began to contemplate desertion. Many succeeded in their efforts, until it became necessary to restrict them from going to Key West upon passes. Passes of every description consequently were restricted and soldiers leaving as much confined on the island as prisoners.

One of the most heartless acts witnessed in this case of civilization happened on the occasion when the laymaster had arrived at the fort to pay off the troops. It was a counterpart of the Middle Ages in cruelty and barbarity. The prisoners were engaged in unloading a vessel moored at the wharf, containing commissary and quartermaster stores for the post. During the work the prisoners, whose duty it was to unload vessels on arrival, indulged freely in spirituous liquors in company with soldiers who had charge of them. A prisoner of the name of James Dunn became heavily intoxicated in company with two of the soldiers who were acting as provost guards.

## TORTURE ALLEGED.

The occurrence was reported to the officer of the day, when he gave orders to the sergeant of the guard to place him on the ring to carry a ball, but finding he was too drunk to comply with the order, ordered him to be tied up. Accordingly, he was tied up to the bell post erected in front of the guardhouse by his wrists, his piercing shrieks during the operation filling every space.

His cries muffled. To smother these cries he was taken down, gagged with a bayonet, tried to carry the ball, but to no avail. The ball fell from his grasp, and as it dropped to the earth he fell with it, crying out, "Sentinel, I cannot carry the ball! Perform your duty—bayonet and kill me."

The sentinel endeavored in various ways to cause compliance, and failing to move him in the matter, repeatedly pricked him with the bayonet. Finding Dunn did not move from his position, the sentinel called upon the sergeant of the guard. Cords were again brought into requisition, and in the roughest manner twisted and bound around his bleeding hands, wrists and thumbs. In the midst of his cries of agony, which reached each portion of the fort, appeals for mercy could be heard. Useless his pleadings, his prayers, his cries, as the form to which he appealed possessed a heart as hard and callous as stone, which had become more hardened through frequent imbibings by him during the day.

There was a gentleman residing with his family upon the island in charge of the lighthouse, whose family was disturbed by the piercing cries of the tortured man, as he screamed out in his agony. He was forced to call upon the officer of the day to ask that other measures be adopted in the manner of punishment. The officer forthwith ordered the sergeant, who received orders and returned to his guard. In a few moments Dunn was removed from the close proximity of the lighthouse. Dunn's lighthouse, and rested to a pair of steps by his hands and wrists, his piercing shrieks during the operation filling every space.

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There is no telling how long he would have remained in this position had not Major-General Hill, commanding, happened to see that way, and, seeing the piece of barbarous cruelty inflicted upon an inoffensive being, immediately directed the sergeant to take him down and place him in the guardhouse. He commanded that in future no man, while in a drunken condition, be punished in like manner. Instead of unloading the cords from his thumbs, they were cut away and Dunn fell heavily upon the ground, not even awakening from the deep sleep as his head came in contact with the hard ground. He was then dragged heavily into the guardhouse, where he remained until relieved.

The officer of the day came down to inspect the guard, and, looking around, called to Dunn, "Inquiring of the sergeant where he was, he was in the guardhouse. The officer ordered that he be taken out and made to carry a ball and lift the sentinel to execute his order. Dunn was brought out, and from the tortures already practiced upon him, was unable to comply with the order, slipping from his grasp. He essayed to balance it upon his shoulders, to comply with the orders, in his provoked condition. In his endeavor to do so he fell twice, once on the 42nd canon ball falling directly upon his chest, as he fell backward, and again on the 42nd canon ball falling upon his back, giving lacerations to his face, his hands, his arms and his legs. He was then dragged heavily into the guardhouse, where he remained until relieved.

Eight o'clock was pointed by the hands of the clock, and Dunn, to the minute, was guarded from the guardhouse to remove his task, and take his punishment. There were others confined in the guardhouse, all of whom were brought forth to receive their punishment. In case the orders given were not strictly complied with.

The severity of the punishment already inflicted upon Dunn made it a physical impossibility for him to conform to the orders given. His hands were unable to perform their office. Repeatedly he grasped the ball, only for the hands unconsciously to relax their hold, letting the ball fall to the earth. When, after repeated efforts, he found it impossible to obey the commands given, the sentinel threatening him with the point of the bayonet if he still persisted in not complying with the orders, in pitiful cries he appealed from one to the other, saying to the sergeant, could he, he would willingly carry the ball as ordered.

"Sergeant," he said, "I am willing to carry the ball. God knows the truth of what I say, but I cannot do it. If you do not believe me, come, oh, come, look at my bleeding hands."

There was no answer: "You must carry the ball. Sentinel, if he refuses to carry it

obey your orders received and run him through your bayonet."

To prevent this he again tried to carry the ball, but to no avail. The ball fell from his grasp, and as it dropped to the earth he fell with it, crying out, "Sentinel, I cannot carry the ball! Perform your duty—bayonet and kill me."

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